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General and complete disarmament: observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control

Observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum*

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* This information was received after the submission of the main report.

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II. Replies received from Governments

Argentina

[Original: Spanish]
[14 May 2004]

The Government of the Argentine Republic observes environmental norms in the implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control. During the past year, environmental impact preventive measures were taken in the destruction of firearms and stocks of anti-personnel mines.

First, two operations were carried out, in which a total of 12,265 firearms were destroyed. In conformity with the legislation in force, the methods of destruction used were consistent with the recommended environmental norms. These methods involved the melting of steel weapons in electric furnaces and adding slag at high temperatures in the case of weapons made of antinomy alloys.

Subsequently, on 4 December 2003, the last phase of implementation of the national plan for the destruction of stocks of anti-personnel mines held by the armed forces was carried out, with the destruction of 20 units, bringing the total number of anti-personnel mines destroyed, in fulfilment of the disarmament obligations arising under article 4 of the Ottawa Convention, to 89,764.

A number of measures were taken for the prevention of environmental damage during the various phases of planning and implementation of the national plan.

Firstly, and as one of the steps taken to safeguard against any accidents during the transportation, handling and destruction of explosive material, the provisions of the applicable national legislation in force were observed. Chapter V of the Partial Regulations Governing Gunpowder, Explosives and Related Materials (Decree No. 302/83) and the Weapons Act (Act No. 20.429) were applied as well as the provisions of the annex to the National Transportation Law (Act. No. 24.449) concerning the movement of hazardous material.

The destruction was carried out by detonations in the open. Under this method, military camps where munitions were regularly destroyed were selected so that the land used had already suffered an environmental impact.

In this connection, it should be noted that within these camps, waste land was generally used that contained soil with a high salt content (retention of toxic elements released by the explosions) and little or no vegetation and which were extensive in area, thereby facilitating the transitory migration of local fauna towards alternative habitats and thus diminishing the impact on the fauna. Livestock were removed from the areas adjacent to the detonation sites to the distances recommended by the competent veterinarian personnel.

In addition, the choice of priming device — based on advice from the Higher Technical School — took into account the need to have a high explosive charge that would at the same time generate the least possible quantity of residue. The maximum charges per detonation were determined on the basis of the limitations of each camp and the recommendations made after seismographic studies had been carried out. The design of the shafts and the way in which the priming device was

placed ensured that explosive material would not be projected and adjacent land contaminated.

Finally, during operations on the site, work began on preparing the adjacent land and fire control systems were installed to prevent the occurrence of fires.

Cuba

[Original: Spanish]
[20 September 2004]

The Government of the Republic of Cuba has submitted an annual report to the Secretary-General on the measures it has taken to achieve the goals set out in resolution 58/45, entitled "Observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control", which the General Assembly of the United Nations has adopted for each of the past eight years.

Cuba wishes to reiterate the points made in its earlier replies submitted to the Secretary-General and contained in documents A/57/121/Add.1 and A/58/129, and to reaffirm that concern for the environment has to be reflected not only in the prevention of serious accidents arising from the handling of radioactive waste but also in the strict implementation and drafting of disarmament and arms control agreements.

In General Assembly resolution 58/45, Member States of the United Nations once again explicitly recognized the detrimental environmental effects of the use of nuclear weapons. There is growing concern at the lack of any real progress towards the total elimination of this type of weapon of mass destruction.

Cuba regrets that the Conference on Disarmament has still not established an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament, despite numerous appeals for it to do so. The establishment of such a committee would be a significant step that would permit negotiations to begin on a phased programme of nuclear disarmament whose goal is the definitive elimination of nuclear weapons within a fixed time frame and under strict international control.

Weapons of mass destruction can cause irreparable harm to the environment. Cuba therefore reiterates that the total elimination of these weapons remains the only really effective solution for avoiding their harmful effects on the environment through their use or through accidental contamination.

Cuba, which is a State party to 35 international instruments on or closely related to the environment, will continue to base its economic and social development programme and the defence of its national territory on environmental conservation and protection.

We call attention to the need to promote closer international cooperation in the peaceful use of scientific and technological progress, which would help to promote sustainable economic development for all States. An essential requirement for the attainment of this goal is the removal of national laws and regulations that impede such international cooperation.

Cuba reiterates its rejection of the application of unilateral measures that undermine the implementation of environmental protection norms and the promotion of sustainable development. Clear examples of such unilateral measures are the ones that have been and continue to be applied against Cuba by the Government of the United States of America.

Cuba reiterates the need to continue to adopt the necessary national, bilateral, regional and multilateral measures so as to contribute to the application of scientific and technological progress in the framework of international security, disarmament and other related spheres, without detriment to the environment or to its effective contribution to attaining sustainable development.